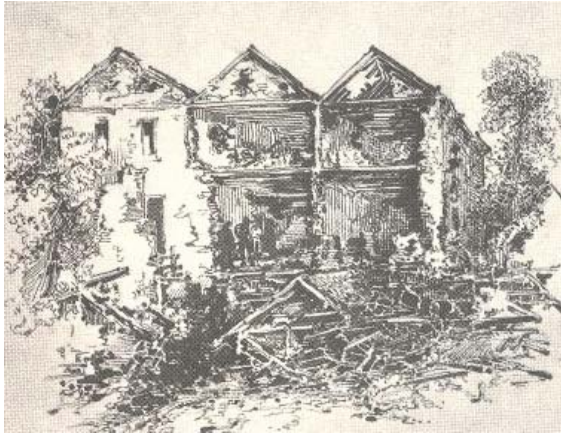




Under Siege



Americans living in caves, explosions riddling their homes above - sounds like a late night science fiction movie, doesn't it? In 1863, it really happened in Vicksburg, Mississippi. During the hardship and uncertainty of a siege, Vicksburg civilians struggled to carry on with everyday life.

To Our Very Hearthstone



Union soldiers dug bombproof shelters beside the Shirley House, near present-day Tour Stop 2.

On May 19th, Ulysses S. Grant, wanting control of the Mississippi River, marched his Union troops as close to the Confederate defenses as he dared. Living on the outskirts of town, the Shirley family found their home caught between two armies.

For three days, Mrs. Shirley, her son, and two slaves, sat near the sheltering brick chimney as bullets and shells crashed through their home, shattering furniture. They escaped, but their home would never be the same again.

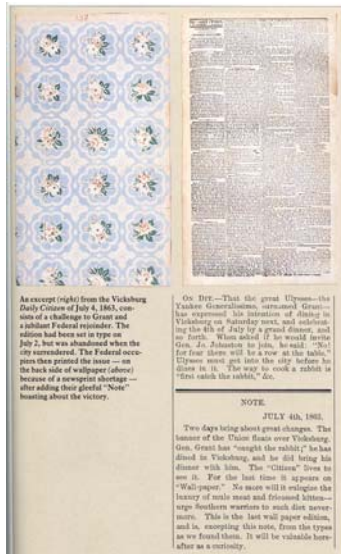
Days of Darkness



Neither would those of many Vicksburg citizens. Grant, after two fruitless attacks, decided to starve the Confederates out, ordering his army to surround Vicksburg. Keeping new food and supplies from the defending army, the Northern lines wrapped so tightly around the town that one soldier bragged, *"Not even a cat could get out."* For forty-seven days, Union shot and shell rained down

on the Confederate fortifications and the town. Many citizens fled to caves dug into the soft ground by enterprising slaves, who were often paid \$30 or more, depending on the cave's size. Rugs covered dirt floors. Candles cast soft flickering glows on mirrors and pictures, beds and rocking chairs, anything to make the caves seem more like home.

Making Do



As Union siege lines tightened around the Confederate troops and town, supplies dwindled. With scarce goods priced beyond their reach, people improvised. *"Nothing is thrown away now,"* a Vicksburg woman wrote, describing how she made a new pair of shoes from old soles and coat sleeves. *"I am*

so proud of these home-made shoes, think I'll put them in a glass case when the war is over, as an heirloom."

The local newspaper continued to be published regularly, printed on wallpaper when paper supplies ran out.

"We are all caught in a rat-hole, General."

- Emma Balfour, Vicksburg civilian



"Hotel de Vicksburg"

The town's food supply grew dangerously low as the siege wore on. Cooks served mule meat at the dinner table. An anonymous citizen, refusing to surrender a sense of humor, wrote a fictitious hotel menu advertising such local delicacies as *"Mule Head Stuffed A La Mode"* and *"Mule Tongue*

Cold A La Bray." Others found little to laugh about. One slave, unable to find food, soaked sweaty horse blankets in mud holes, wrung them out, and drank the filthy water, which was *"strength'nin', like weak soup."*

The End...and a New Beginning



It was getting harder to carry on. As July began, Confederate General John C. Pemberton polled his officers about the status of the army. One message rang clear: their spirits were unbroken, but their bodies couldn't carry on like this much longer. On July 4, 1863, the citizens of Vicksburg emerged from their caves to see the Union army marching into the

city having received the surrender of the Confederate troops. The long siege was over. During the next years of Union occupation, the citizens would remember how they had persevered during the siege and know that somehow they would survive the vastly changing world around them.